

Louly and Pretty Boy (Ss)

Leonard, Elmore



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ELMORE LEONARD

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Here are some dates in Louly Ring's life from 1912, the year she was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to 1931, when she ran away from home to meet Joe Young, following his release from the Missouri State Penitentiary.

In 1918 her daddy, a Tulsa stockyard hand, joined the U.S. Marines and was killed at Bois de Belleau during the World War. Her mom, sniffing as she held the letter, told Louly it was a woods over in France.

In 1920 her mom married a hardshell Baptist by the name of Otis Bender and they went to live on his cotton farm near Sallisaw, south of Tulsa on the edge of the Cookson Hills. By the time Louly was twelve, her mom had two sons by Otis and Otis had Louly out in the fields picking cotton. He was the only person in the world who called her by her Christian name, Louise. She hated picking cotton but her mom wouldn't say anything to Otis. Otis believed that when you were old enough to do a day's work, you worked. It meant Louly was finished with school by the sixth grade.

In 1924, that summer, they attended her cousin Ruby's wedding in Bixby. Ruby was seventeen, the boy she married, Charley Floyd, twenty. Ruby was dark but pretty, showing Cherokee blood from her mama's side. Because of their age difference Louly and Ruby had nothing to say to each other. Charley called her kiddo and would lay his hand on her head and muss

her bobbed hair that was sort of reddish from her mom. He told her she had the biggest brown eyes he had ever seen on a little girl.

In 1925 she began reading about Charles Arthur Floyd in the paper: how he and two others went up to St. Louis and robbed the Kroger Food payroll office of \$11,500. They were caught in Sallisaw driving around in a brand-new Studebaker they bought in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The Kroger Food paymaster identified Charley saying, "That's him, the pretty boy with apple cheeks." The newspapers ate it up and referred to Charley from then on as Pretty Boy Floyd.

Louly remembered him from the wedding as cute with wavy hair, but kind of scary the way he grinned at you-not being sure what he was thinking. She bet he hated being called Pretty Boy. Looking at his picture she cut out of the paper Louly felt herself getting a crush on him.

In 1929, while he was still in the penitentiary, Ruby divorced him on the grounds of neglect and married a man from Kansas. Louly thought it was terrible, Ruby betraying Charley like that. "Ruby don't see him ever again going straight," her mom said. "She needs a husband the same as I did to ease the burdens of life, have a father for her little boy Dempsey." Born in December of '24 and named for the world's heavyweight boxing champ.

Now that Charley was divorced Louly wanted to write and sympathize but didn't know which of his names to use. She had heard his friends called him Choc, after his fondness for Choctaw Beer, his favorite beverage when he was in his teens and roamed

Oklahoma and Kansas with harvest crews. Her mom said it was where he first took up with bad companions, "those drifters he met at harvest time," and later on working oil patches.

Louly opened her letter "Dear Charley," and said she thought it was a shame Ruby divorcing him while he was still in prison, not having the nerve to wait till he was out. What she most wanted to know, "Do you remember me from your wedding?" She stuck a picture of herself in a bathing suit, standing sideways and smiling over her shoulder at the camera. This way her fourteen-year-old breasts, coming along, were seen in profile.

Charley wrote back saying sure he remembered her, "the little girl with the big brown eyes." Saying, "I'm getting out in March and going to Kansas City to see what's doing. I have given your address to an inmate here by the name of Joe Young who we call Booger, being funny. He is from Okmulgee but has to do another year or so in this garbage can and would like to have a pen pal as pretty as you are."

Nuts. But then Joe Young wrote her a letter with a picture of himself taken in the yard with his shirt off, a fairly good-looking bozo with big ears and blondish hair. He said he kept her bathing-suit picture on the wall next to his rack so he'd look at it before going to sleep and dream of her all night. He never signed his letters Booger, always, "With love, your Joe Young."

Once they were exchanging letters she told him how much she hated picking cotton, dragging that duck sack along the cows all day in the heat and dust, her hands raw from pulling the bolls off the stalks,

gloves after a while not doing a bit of good. Joe said in his letter, "What are you a nigger slave? You don't like picking cotton leave there and run away. It is what I done."

Pretty soon he said in a letter, "I am getting my release sometime next summer. Why don't you plan on meeting me so we can get together." Louly said she was dying to visit Kansas City and St. Louis, wondering if she would ever see Charley Floyd again. She asked Joe why he was in prison and he wrote back to say, "Honey, I'm a bank robber, same as Choc."

She had been reading more stories about Pretty Boy Floyd. He had returned to Akins, his hometown, for his daddy's funeral-Akins only seven miles from Sallisaw-his dad shot by a neighbor during an argument over a pile of lumber. When the neighbor disappeared there were people who said Pretty Boy had killed him. Seven miles away and she didn't know it till after.

There was his picture again, pretty boy Floyd arrested in Akron for bank robbery. Sentenced to fifteen years in the Ohio State Penitentiary. Now she'd never see him but at least could start writing again.

A few weeks later another picture, pretty boy Floyd escapes on way to prison. Broke a window in the toilet and jumped off the train and by the time they got it stopped he was gone.

It was exciting just trying to keep track of him, Louly getting chills and thrills knowing everybody in the world was reading about this famous outlaw she was related to-by marriage but not blood-this

desperado who liked her brown eyes and had mussed her hair when she was a kid.

Now another picture, pretty boy Floyd in shootout with police. Outside a barbershop in Bowling Green, Ohio, and got away. There with a woman named Juanita-Louly not liking the sound of that.

Joe Young wrote to say, "I bet Choc is threw with Ohio and will never go back there." But the main reason he wrote was to tell her, "I am getting my release the end of August. I will let you know soon where to meet me."

Louly had been working winters at Harkrider's grocery store in Sallisaw for six dollars a week part-time. She had to give five of it to Otis, the man never once thanking her, leaving a dollar to put in her running-away kitty. From winter to the next fall, working at the store most of six months a year, she hadn't saved a whole lot but she was going. She might have her timid-soul mom's looks, the reddish hair, but had the nerve and get-up-and-go of her daddy, killed in action charging a German machine gun nest in that woods in France.

Late in October, who walked in the grocery store but Joe Young. Louly knew him even wearing a suit, and he knew her, grinning as he came up to the counter, his shirt wide open at the neck. He said, "Well, I'm out."

She said, "You been out two months, haven't you?"

He said, "I been robbing banks. Me and Choc."

She thought she had to go to the bathroom, the

urge coming over her in her groin and then gone. Louly gave herself a few moments to compose herself and act like the mention of Choc didn't mean anything special, Joe Young staring in her face with his grin, giving her the feeling he was dumb as dirt. Some other convict must've wrote his letters for him. She said in a casual way, "Oh, is Charley here with you?"

"He's around," Joe Young said, looking toward the door. "You ready? We gotta go."

She said, "I like that suit on you," giving herself time to think. The points of his shirt collar spread open to his shoulders, his hair long on top but skinned on the sides, his ears sticking out, Joe Young grinning like it was his usual dopey expression. "I'm not ready just yet," Louly said. "I don't have my running-away money with me."

"How much you save?"

"Thirty-eight dollars."

"Jesus, working here two years?"

"I told you, Otis takes most of my wages."

"You want, I'll crack his head for him."

"I wouldn't mind. The thing is, I'm not leaving without my money."

Joe Young looked at the door as he put his hand in his pocket saying, "Little girl, I'm paying your way. You won't need the thirty-eight dollars."

Little girl-she stood a good two inches taller than he was, even in his run-down cowboy boots. She was

shaking her head now. "Otis bought a Model A Roadster with my money, paying it off twenty a month."

"You want to steal his car?"

"It's mine, ain't it, if he's using my money?"

Louly had made up her mind and Joe Young was anxious to get out of here. She had pay coming, so they'd meet November first-no, the second-at the Georgian Hotel in Henryetta, in the coffee shop around noon.

The day before she was to leave Louly told her mom she was sick. Instead of going to work she got her things ready and used the curling iron on her hair. The next day, while her mom was hanging wash, the two boys at school and Otis was out in the field, Louly rolled the Ford Roadster out of the shed and drove into Sallisaw to get a pack of Lucky Strikes for the trip. She loved to smoke and had been doing it with boys but never had to buy the cigarettes. When boys wanted to take her in the woods she'd ask, "You have Luckies? A whole pack?"

The druggist's son, one of her boyfriends, gave her a pack free of charge and asked where she was yesterday, acting sly, saying, "You're always talking about Pretty Boy Floyd, I wonder if he stopped by your house."

They liked to kid her about Pretty Boy. Louly, not paying close attention, said, "I'll let you know when he does." But then saw the boy about to spring something on her.

"The reason I ask, he was here in town yesterday, Pretty Boy Floyd was."

She said, "Oh?" careful now. The boy took his time and it was hard not to grab him by the front of his shirt.

"Yeah, he brought his family down from Akins, his mama, two of his sisters, some others, so they could watch him rob the bank. His grampa watched from the field across the street. Bob Riggs, the bank assistant, said Pretty Boy had a Tommy gun, but did not shoot anybody. He come out of the bank with two thousand five-hundred and thirty-one dollars, him and two other fellas. He gave some of the money to his people and they say to anybody he thought hadn't et in a while, everybody grinning at him. Pretty Boy had Bob Riggs ride on the running board to the end of town and let him go."

This was the second time now he had been close by: first when his daddy was killed only seven miles away and now right here in Sallisaw, all kinds of people seeing him, damn it, but her. Just yesterday...

He knew she lived in Sallisaw. She wondered if he'd looked for her in the crowd watching.

She had to wonder, too, if she had been here would he of recognized her, and bet he would've.

She said to her boyfriend in the drugstore, "Charley ever hears you called him Pretty Boy, he'll come in for a pack of Luckies, what he always smokes, and then kill you."

The Georgian was the biggest hotel Louly had ever seen. Coming up on it in the Model A she was thinking these bank robbers knew how to live high on the hog. She pulled in front and a colored man in a green uniform coat with gold buttons and a peaked cap came around to open her door-and saw Joe Young on the sidewalk waving the doorman away, saying as he got in the car, "Jesus Christ, you stole it, didn't you. Jesus, how old are you, going around stealing cars?"

Louly said, "How old you have to be?"

He told her to keep straight ahead.

She said, "You aren't staying at the hotel?"

"I'm at a tourist court."

"Charley there?"

"He's around someplace."

"Well, he was in Sallisaw yesterday," Louly sounding mad now, "if that's what you call around" seeing by Joe Young's expression she was telling him something he didn't know. "I thought you were in his gang."

"He's got an old boy name of Birdwell with him. I hook up with Choc when I feel like it."

She was almost positive Joe Young was lying to her.

"Am I gonna see Charley or not?"

"He'll be back, don't worry your head about it." He said, "We got this car, I won't have to steal one." Joe

Young in a good mood now. "What we need Choc for?" Grinning at her close by the car. "We got each other."

It told her what to expect.

Once they got to the tourist court and were in No. 7, like a little one-room frame house that needed paint, Joe Young took off his coat and she saw the Colt automatic with a pearl grip stuck in his pants. He laid it on the dresser by a full quart of whiskey and two glasses and poured them each a drink, his bigger than hers. She stood watching till he told her to take off her coat and when she did told her to take off her dress. Now she was in her white brassiere and panties. Joe Young looked her over before handing the smaller drink to her and clinking glasses.

"To our future."

Louly said, "Doing what?" Seeing the fun in his eyes.

He put his glass on the dresser, brought two .38 revolvers from the drawer and offered her one. She took it, big and heavy in her hand and said, "Yeah... ?"

"You know how to steal a car," Joe Young said, "and I admire that. But I bet you never held up a place with a gun."

"That's what we're gonna do?"

"Start with a filling station and work you up to a bank." He said, "I bet you never been to bed with a grown man, either."

Louly felt like telling him she was bigger than he was, taller, anyway, but didn't. This was a new experience, different than with boys her age in the woods, and she wanted to see what it was like.

Well, he grunted a lot and was rough, breathed hard through his nose and smelled of Lucky Tiger hair tonic, but it wasn't that much different than with boys. She got to liking it before he was finished and patted his back with her rough, cotton-picking fingers till he began to breathe easy again. Once he rolled off her she got her douche bag out of Otis's grip she'd taken and went in the bathroom, Joe Young's voice following her with, "Whooooeee..."

Then saying, "You know what you are now, little girl? You're what's called a gun moll."

Joe Young slept awhile, woke up still snookered and wanted to get something to eat. So they went to Purity, Joe said was the best place in Henryetta.

Louly said at the table, "Charley Floyd came in here one time. People found out he was in town and everybody stayed in their house."

"How you know that?"

"I know everything about him was ever written, some things only told."

"Where'd he stay in Kansas City?"

"Mother Ash's boardinghouse on Holmes Street."

"Who'd he go to Ohio with?"

"The Jim Bradley gang."

Joe Young picked up his coffee he'd poured a shot into. He said, "You're gonna start reading about me, chile."

It reminded her she didn't know how old Joe Young was and took this opportunity to ask him.

"I'm thirty next month, born on Christmas Day, same as Baby Jesus."

Louly smiled. She couldn't help it, seeing Joe Young lying in a manger with Baby Jesus, the three Wise Men looking at him funny. She asked Joe how many times he'd had his picture in the paper.

"When I got sent to Jeff City they's all kinds of pictures of me was in there."

"I mean how many different times, for other stickups?"

She watched him sit back as the waitress came with their supper and he gave her a pat on the butt as she turned from the table. The waitress said, "Fresh," and acted surprised in a cute way. Louly was ready to tell how Charley Floyd had his picture in the Sallisaw paper fifty-one times in the past year, once for each of the fifty-one banks robbed in Oklahoma, all of them claiming Charley as the bank robber. But if she told him, Joe Young would say Charley couldn't of robbed that many since he was in Ohio part of '31. Which was true. An estimate said he might've robbed thirty-eight banks, but even that might cause Joe Young to be jealous and get cranky, so she let it drop and they ate their chicken-fried steaks.

Joe Young told her to pay the bill, a buck-sixty for

everything including rhubarb pie for dessert, out of her running-away money. They got back to the tourist court and he screwed her again on her full stomach, breathing through his nose, and she saw how this being a gun moll wasn't all a bed of roses.

* * * *

In the morning they set out east on Highway 40 for the Cookson Hills, Joe Young driving the Model A with his elbow out the window, Louly holding her coat close to her, the collar up against the wind, Joe Young talking a lot, saying he knew where Choc liked to hide. They'd go on up to Muskogee, cross the Arkansas and head down along the river to Braggs. "I know the boy likes that country around Braggs." Along the way he could hold up a filling station, show Louly how it was done.

Heading out of Henryetta she said, "There's one."

He said, "Too many cars."

Thirty miles later leaving Checotah, turning north toward Muskogee, Louly looked back and said, "What's wrong with that Texaco station?"

"Something about it I don't like," Joe Young said. "You have to have a feel for this work."

Louly said, "You pick it." She had the .38 he gave her in a black and pink bag her mom had crocheted for her.

They came up on Summit and crept through town, both of them looking, Louly waiting for him to choose a place to rob. She was getting excited. They came to

the other side of town and Joe Young said, "There's our place. We can fill up, get a cup of coffee."

Louly said, "Hold it up?"

"Look it over."

"It's sure a dump."

Two gas pumps in front of a rickety place, paint peeling, a sign that said eats and told that soup was a dime and a ham-burg five cents.

They went in while a bent-over old man filled their tank, Joe Young bringing his whiskey bottle with him, almost drained, and put it on the counter. The woman behind it was skin and bones, worn out, brushing strands of hair from her face. She placed cups in front of them and Joe Young poured what was left in the bottle into his.

Louly did not want to rob this woman.

The woman saying, "I think she's dry."

Joe Young was concentrating on dripping the last drops from his bottle. He said, "Can you help me out?"

Now the woman was pouring their coffee. "You want shine? Or I can give you Kentucky for three dollars."

"Gimme a couple," Joe Young said, drawing his Colt, laying it on the counter, "and what's in the till."

Louly did not want to rob this woman. She was thinking you didn't have to rob a person just 'cause the person had money, did you?

The woman said, "Goddamn you, mister."

Joe Young picked up his gun and went around to open the cash register at the end of the counter. Taking out bills he said to the woman, "Where you keep the whiskey money?"

She said, "In there," despair in her voice.

He said, "Fourteen dollars?" holding it up, and turned to Louly. "Put your gun on her so she don't move. The geezer come in, put it on him, too." Joe Young went through a doorway to what looked like an office.

The woman said to Louly, pointing the gun from the crocheted bag at her now, "How come you're with that trash? You seem like a girl from a nice family, have a pretty bag... There something wrong with you? My Lord, you can't do better'n him?"

Louly said, "You know who's a good friend of mine? Charley Floyd, if you know who I mean. He married my cousin Ruby." The woman shook her head and Louly said, "Pretty Boy Floyd," and wanted to bite her tongue.

Now the woman seemed to smile, showing black lines between the teeth she had. "He come in here one time. I fixed him breakfast and he paid me two dollars for it. You ever hear of that? I charge twenty-five cents for two eggs, four strips of bacon, toast and all you want of coffee, and he give me two dollars."

"When was this?" Louly said.

The woman looked past Louly trying to see when it

was and said, "Twenty-nine, after his daddy was killed that time."

They got the fourteen from the till and fifty-seven dollars in whiskey money from the back, Joe Young talking again about heading for Muskogee, telling Louly it was his instinct told him to go in there. How was this place doing business, two big service stations only a few blocks away? So he'd brought the bottle in, see what it would get him. "You hear what she said? 'Goddamn you,' but called me 'Mister.'"

"Charley had breakfast in there one time," Louly said, "and paid her two dollars for it."

"Showing off," Joe Young said.

He decided they'd stay in Muskogee instead of going down to Braggs and rest up here.

Louly said, "Yeah, we must've come a good fifty miles today."

Joe Young told her not to get smart with him. "I'm gonna put you in a tourist cabin and see some boys I know. Find out where Choc's at."

She didn't believe him, but what was the sense of arguing?

* * * *

It was early evening now, the sun going down.

The man who knocked on the door-she could see him through the glass part-was tall and slim in a dark suit, a young guy dressed up, holding his hat at his leg. She believed he was the police, but had no reason,

standing here looking at him, not to open the door.

He said, "Miss," and showed her his I.D. and a star in a circle in a wallet he held open, "I'm Deputy U.S. Marshal Carl Webster. Who am I speaking to?"

She said, "I'm Louly Ring?"

He smiled straight teeth at her and said, "You're a cousin of Pretty Boy Floyd's wife, Ruby, aren't you?"

Like getting ice-cold water thrown in her face she was so surprised. "How'd you know that?"

"We been making a book on Pretty Boy, noting down connections, everybody he knows. You recall the last time you saw him?"

"At their wedding, eight years ago."

"No time since? How about the other day in Sallisaw?"

"I never saw him. But listen, him and Ruby are divorced."

The marshal, Carl Webster, shook his head. "He went up to Coffeyville and got her back. But aren't you missing a automobile, a Model A Ford?"

She had not heard a word about Charley and Ruby being back together. None of the papers ever mentioned her, just the woman named Juanita. Louly said, "The car isn't missing, a friend of mine's using it."

He said, "The car's in your name?" and recited the Oklahoma license number.

"I paid for it out of my wages. It just happens to be in my stepfather's name, Otis Bender."

"I guess there's some kind of misunderstanding," Carl Webster said. "Otis claims it was stolen off his property in Sequoyah County. Who's your friend borrowed it?"

She did hesitate before saying his name.

"When's Joe coming back?"

"Later on. 'Cept he'll stay with his friends he gets too drunk."

Carl Webster said, "I wouldn't mind talking to him," and gave Louly a business card from his pocket with a star on it and letters she could feel. "Ask Joe to give me a call later on, or sometime tomorrow if he don't come home. Y'all just driving around?"

"Seeing the sights."

Every time she kept looking at him he'd start to smile. Carl Webster. She could feel his name under her thumb. She said, "You're writing a book on Charley Floyd?"

"Not a real one. We're collecting the names of anybody he ever knew that might want to put him up."

"You gonna ask me if I would?"

There was the smile.

"I already know."

She liked the way he shook her hand and thanked her, and the way he put on his hat, nothing to it, knowing how to cock it just right.

* * * *

Joe Young returned about 9:00 a.m. making awful faces working his mouth, trying to get a taste out of it. He came in the room and took a good pull on the whiskey bottle, then another, sucked in his breath and let it out and seemed better. He said, "I don't believe what we got into with those chickens last night."

"Wait," Louly said. She told him about the marshal stopping by, and Joe Young became jittery and couldn't stand still, saying, "I ain't going back. I done ten years and swore to Jesus I ain't ever going back." Now he was looking out the window.

Louly wanted to know what Joe and his buddies did to the chickens, but knew they had to get out of here. She tried to tell him they had to leave, right now.

He was still drunk or starting over, saying now, "They come after me they's gonna be a shoot-out. I'm taking some of the scudders with me." Maybe not even knowing he was playing Jimmy Cagney now.

Louly said, "You only stole seventy-one dollars."

"I done other things in the State of Oklahoma," Joe Young said. "They take me alive I'm facing fifteen years to life. I swear I ain't going back."

What was going on here? They're driving around looking for Charley Floyd-the next thing this dumbbell

wants to shoot it out with the law and here she was in this room with him. "They don't want me" Louly said. Knowing she couldn't talk to him, the state he was in. She had to get out of here, open the door and run. She got her crocheted bag from the dresser, started for the door and was stopped by the bullhorn.

The electrified voice loud, saying, "JOE YOUNG, COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR."

What Joe Young did-he held his Colt straight out in front of him and started firing through the glass pane in the door. People outside returned fire, blew out the window, gouged the door with gunfire, Louly dropping to the floor with her bag, until she heard a voice on the bullhorn call out, "HOLD YOUR FIRE."

Louly looked up to see Joe Young standing by the bed with a gun in each hand now, the Colt and a .38. She said, "Joe, you have to give yourself up. They're gonna kill both of us you keep shooting."

He didn't even look at her. He yelled out, "Come and get me!" and started shooting again, both guns at the same time.

Louly's hand went in the crocheted bag and came out with the .38 he'd given her to help him rob places. From the floor, up on her elbows, she aimed the revolver at Joe Young, cocked it and bam, shot him through the chest.

* * * *

Louly stepped away from the door and the marshal, Carl Webster, came in holding a revolver. She saw men standing out in the road, some with rifles. Carl

Webster was looking at Joe Young curled up on the floor. He holstered his revolver, took the .38 from Louly and sniffed the end of the barrel and stared at her without saying anything before going to one knee to see if Joe Young had a pulse. He got up saying, "The Oklahoma Bankers Association wants people like Joe dead, and that's what he is. They're gonna give you a five-hundred-dollar reward for killing your friend."

"He wasn't a friend."

"He was yesterday. Make up your mind."

"He stole the car and made me go with him."

"Against your will," Carl Webster said. "Stay with that you won't go to jail."

"It's true, Carl," Louly said, showing him her big brown eyes. "Really."

* * * *

The headline in the Muskogee paper, over a small photo of Louise Ring, said sallisaw girl shoots abductor.

According to Louise, she had to stop Joe Young or be killed in the exchange of gunfire. She also said her name was Louly, not Louise. The marshal on the scene said it was a courageous act, the girl shooting her abductor. "We considered Joe Young a mad-dog felon with nothing to lose." The marshal said that Joe Young was suspected of being a member of Pretty Boy Floyd's gang. He also mentioned that Louly Ring was related to Floyd's wife and acquainted with the

desperado.

The headline in the Tulsa paper, over a larger photo of Louly, said girl shoots member of pretty boy Floyd gang. The story told that Louly Ring was a friend of Pretty Boy's and had been abducted by the former gang member, who, according to Louly, "was jealous of Pretty Boy and kidnapped me to get back at him."

By the time the story had appeared everywhere from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, to Toledo, Ohio, the favorite headline was

GIRLFRIEND OF PRETTY BOY FLOYD GUNS
DOWN MAD-DOG FELON.

The marshal, Carl Webster, came to Sallisaw on business and stopped in Harkrider's for a sack of Beechnut scrap. He was surprised to see Louly.

"You're still working here?"

"I'm shopping for my mom. No, Carl, I got my reward money and I'll be leaving here pretty soon. Otis hasn't said a word to me since I got home. He's afraid I might shoot him."

"Where you going?"

"This writer for True Detective wants me to come to Tulsa. They'll put me up at the Mayo Hotel and pay a hundred dollars for my story. Reporters from Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri, have already been to the house."

"You're sure getting a lot of mileage out of knowing

Pretty Boy, aren't you?"

"They start out asking about my shooting that dumbbell Joe Young, but what they want to know, if I'm Charley Floyd's girlfriend. I say, 'Where'd you get that idea?'"

"But you don't deny it."

"I say, 'Believe what you want, since I can't change your mind.' What I wonder, you think Charley's read about it and seen my picture?"

"Sure he has," Carl said. "I imagine he'd even like to see you again, in person."

Louly said, "Wow," like she hadn't thought of that before this moment. "You're kidding. Really?"